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Drag Queen Pattie Gonia Says She'll Fight $1 Patagonia Case

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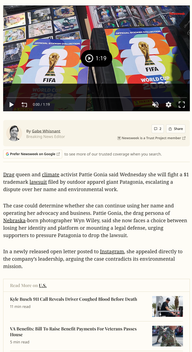

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Breaking News Editor

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Drag queen and climate activist Pattie Gonia said Wednesday she will fight a $1 trademark lawsuit filed by outdoor apparel giant Patagonia, escalating a dispute over her name and environmental work.

The case could determine whether she can continue using her name and operating her advocacy and business. Pattie Gonia, the drag persona of Nebraska-born photographer Wyn Wiley, said she now faces a choice between losing her identity and platform or mounting a legal defense, urging supporters to pressure Patagonia to drop the lawsuit.

In a newly released open letter posted to Instagram, she appealed directly to the company's leadership, arguing the case contradicts its environmental mission.

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Newsweek reached out to Patagonia via email for comment.

Drag queen and climate activist Pattie Gonia said Wednesday she will fight a trademark lawsuit filed by outdoor apparel giant Patagonia. | Instagram

Pattie Gonia Appeals to Patagonia's Leadership and Values

Addressing CEO Ryan Gellert, the board of directors and the company's Purpose Trust, Pattie Gonia opened by praising Patagonia as an "exceptional company" with a long-standing commitment to environmental protection. She positioned her own work within that mission, writing, "I have spent 8 years building something I am proud of," including a community of more than 3 million people and millions raised for environmental causes.

She argued the lawsuit, filed in January in federal court in California, threatens to dismantle that work.

"After 8 years, some executives at your company and your outside lawyers have decided that I must cease to exist," she wrote, describing the case as harmful not only to her but also to "the people I employ, the millions of people I try to inspire, and dozens of nonprofit organizations that I have supported."

The letter frames her advocacy as extending beyond performance into fundraising, environmental education and expanding access to the outdoors, arguing that losing the "Pattie Gonia" name would effectively erase the foundation of that work.

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An LGBTQ+ Pride sign in front of a Patagonia store in Boston, photographed on July 10, 2024.

Lawsuit Raises Stakes Beyond Nominal Damages

Patagonia has defended the lawsuit as a necessary step to protect its long-standing trademarks, arguing it cannot selectively enforce its brand based on whether it agrees with a person's cause. In a public statement, the company said it had spent years trying to resolve the issue with Pattie Gonia before turning to litigation, adding that the case is about maintaining legal control over its name and branding.

The company has also stressed that failing to act could weaken its ability to enforce its trademarks in other cases, potentially opening the door to misuse by other entities. Although Patagonia is seeking only $1 in damages, the company alleges that Pattie Gonia's name, merchandise and activities overlap with its trademarked brand and could confuse consumers.

"We're not against art, creative expression, or commentary about our brand," Patagonia said in a January statement. "We want Pattie to have a long and successful career and make progress on issues that matter — but in a way that respects Patagonia's intellectual property."

In her letter, Pattie Gonia emphasized the practical consequences of the case, warning it could "grind me down so far that I can't continue to operate," citing potentially $1 million in legal costs and loss of her identity as an activist brand. She said Patagonia, founded in 1973 in Ventura, California, by climber and environmentalist Yvon Chouinard, filed the lawsuit "without warning," prompting her to pursue what she described as an "amicable settlement" over the past four months.

"I have believed from the beginning that there is room for an agreement that protects your trademark while letting me keep my name and my work," she wrote, adding that she still hopes for a resolution outside of court.

View this post on Instagram

Activist Frames Dispute as Clash Over Mission

Pattie Gonia rose to prominence in 2018 after posting videos of herself hiking in full drag, quickly building a large social media following with content that blends humor, performance and climate advocacy, like videos—often filmed on mountains and trails—have reached millions of viewers, helping to grow an online audience of more than 1.5 million across platforms and establishing her as a prominent voice in environmental and LGBTQ+ activism.

Through that platform, she has organized hikes and community events, co-founded the nonprofit Outdoorist Club to expand access to the outdoors, and raised millions of dollars for environmental and inclusion-focused causes.

Striking a more personal tone in her letter, Pattie Gonia argued that the legal fight diverts resources from environmental priorities.

"Our home planet needs every dollar and every moment of time we can all give to it right now," she wrote. "We can't afford to waste time and money fighting among ourselves."

She also invoked Patagonia's stated purpose, challenging whether the lawsuit aligns with its mission to "save the home planet." Referencing Chouinard, she added, "You are what you do, not what you say you are," suggesting the case undercuts the company's public values.

Pattie Gonia closed with a direct appeal for de-escalation, urging Patagonia's leadership to intervene.

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"This lawsuit serves no good purpose," she wrote. "Let's make peace and get back to our common love of the planet...I ask you to intervene and drop this lawsuit today."

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